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# Introduction: Sex, Consumption and Commerce in the Contemporary City

**Abstract.** Recent accounts of sexual commerce have drawn attention to the proliferation of online and sexual consumption. Yet the mediated exchange of sexual images and content folds into the spaces of the city in a variety of complex ways. Drawing on a variety of social science perspectives, this paper provides an introductory overview of a collection of papers exploring the changing contours of sexual consumption in the city and the distribution of sexual commerce across – and between - private, domestic and public, commercial spaces. Exploring the ways in which diverse LGBT and heterosexual identities are differently marketised, commodified and consumed, this introduction argues that over the last decade, contradictory moments of sexual emancipation and repression have changed where (and how) sexual consumption is visible in the city, shaping rights to the city in complex ways which need to be more thoroughly acknowledged in ‘mainstream’ urban studies.

**Keywords:** consumption, sexuality , queer studies , gender studies , sex work , planning

## Introduction

Urban studies has long been noted as fairly squeamish about sexual matters, seeing these as somehow irrelevant to the modes of production and consumption, and associated waves of investment and disinvestment, that shape the cityscape. Beyond a few pioneering studies of ‘vice’ (some emerging from the Chicago School, such as Walter Reckless’ [1933] pioneering studies of prostitution), and one or two studies of ‘deviant’ gay scenes (most notably Laud Humphrey’s [1970] *Tearoom Trade*), it was not until the latter decades of the twentieth century that urban scholars began to acknowledge the importance of sexuality in any significant number. Here, work informed by ‘queer’ perspectives was particularly important in highlighting the assumptions inherent in mainstream (and apparently asexual) urban studies, with ‘sexuality and space’ studies from geography, planning, sociology, economics and law showing that the city is experienced in particular and distinctive ways by those whose sexuality differs from the assumed heterosexual, procreative, monogamous norm.

In this respect, when *Urban Studies* (volume 41, no 9, 2004) published a special issue entitled ‘Sex and the City: social and economic explorations in urban sexuality’ edited by Alan Collins, this was not only the first instance of the journal devoting a special issue to the intersection of sexuality and the city, it represented perhaps the first substantive collection of papers in any journal considering the wide range of ways that urban processes are shaped by sexualities. Pioneering in the sense that it did not restrict its discussion of urban sexuality to the location and production of ‘gay villages’ or sites of commercial sex and ‘vice’, the special issue has been well-cited in both its original and reprinted book form (i.e. as *Cities of*

*Pleasure*) as a collection that explored the imbrication of sexuality and space as it is expressed across a variety of sites, both urban and suburban. As such, it stands as an important landmark in what has now become a more established tradition of writing on sexuality and the city (e.g. see Doan, 2011, 2015; Hubbard; 2012; Johnston and Longhurst, 2010; Maginn and Steinmetz, 2014).

This Special Issue is not just a follow-up to, but also a development of, that pioneering special issue, and aspires to the same spirit of inter-disciplinarity that characterized it. However, by focusing on the intersection of sex, consumption and the city, it represents a more focused collection that considers how the contemporary city serves as a setting for diverse forms of sexual consumption. Here, we use the term sexual consumption to include the purchase of sexual services (and sex itself), as well as the way that other forms of consumption are inflected by questions of sexual identity and orientation. While it perhaps overstates the case to insist that all forms of consumption are bound into questions of sex and desire, it is obvious that many forms of leisure and pleasure (e.g. going out to the movies, for a meal, to a club or bar) are connected to the pursuit of sexual pleasure, whilst fundamental decisions about where (and how) we live are also shaped by our changing personal lives and relationships.

Here, it is important to note that in the last decade or so, sociotechnical developments have profoundly changed the relationship between bodies, space and sex, with mobile technologies and geo-referenced apps like *Grindr* or *Tinder* allowing people to seek and find sexualized encounter in even unfamiliar cities, while webcam sex work and online chat rooms allow people to pursue mediated sex at a distance (Jones, 2016). While the significance of new technologies – and the profusion of sexual content online – can easily be overstated, there has clearly been something important happening here, with some of the traditional boundaries between private and public, intimate and shared, suburban and urban being inverted, with some of the forms of sexualized encounter once imagined to only to occur in red light districts or twilight areas now just as likely – if not more so – to occur in the areas once thought more straitlaced and polite. For some, this is evidence of the *democratization of desire*, a process that has resulted in more diverse populations having better access to sexual pleasure than ever before (McNair, 2002). As such, the city is becoming more accommodating of women's sexual agency (something reflected in the emergence of sex shops aimed specifically at women, for example) (Evans et al, 2010). Another symptom is the increasing irrelevance of gay 'villages' as prime sites of sexual consumption and identification among LGBT populations (Lewis, 2013), with LGBT venues becoming more dispersed (albeit this is an observation that is more relevant in some cities than others). The fact that in some jurisdictions sex workers can now legally sell sexual services from commercial premises – or even their own home – in suburban areas also reflects what can be seen as a sexual liberalization that has followed from sociotechnical transitions and associated legal reforms (Hubbard and Prior, 2012).

But none of these processes appear unidirectional, or apply universally. At the same moment that there is liberalization, there is backlash. The divergence and dispersal of sexual commerce is resisted: NIMBY sentiments can still be expressed when 'queer' forms of commerce emerge in spaces still thought of as heteronormal; and municipal laws often struggle to encompass new forms of sexual expression within existing understandings of what rightly belongs where. Lap dancing clubs, gay saunas, sex shops, brothels, and sex clubs all create employment and tax revenue, but they are frequently opposed by business

and resident groups when they are proposed for areas with little tradition of sexual and adult entertainment (Linz et al, 2004; Hubbard, 2009). Equally, moral panics about access to pornography, or concerns about sexual violence, can provide a rationale for discouraging domesticized forms of sexual consumption, despite the state's often expressed view that it has no interest in what consenting adults do in the privacy of their own homes (Wilkinson, 2011). And even though businesses targeting LGBT consumers are now not necessarily confined to 'gay ghettos', this does not mean that homophobic sentiments do not surface in other spaces, or that LGBT businesses themselves are in any way inclusive or welcoming of all expressions of LGBT desire (Held, 2015). Consumption is always tied into class, and many spaces of sexual consumption in the 'neoliberal city' remain stubbornly off limits to those on lower incomes (Taylor, 2016)..

This divergence and dispersal of sexual commerce, and the emergence of new forms – and spaces - of sexual encounter is then indicative of important shifts in the relations between bodies, pleasures and city-spaces. Noting that traditional divides between private and public life (and home and work) are breaking down thanks to the *layering* of socio-technical forms of life in the city, this issue hence considers how new commodity forms are being produced through the selective enfolding of bodies, images, objects, and rituals in cities, at the same time that others are being repressed or devalued. This matters for urban studies because sexuality (and desire) is one of the primary forces that animates cities, and in the process bequeaths neighbourhoods and districts with different reputations and atmospheres. Put somewhat differently, this matters because sexuality is fundamental to life itself, and any consideration of urban studies that attempts to underplay the importance of sexuality is liable to omit an important dimension of all of our lives – one that is arguably as important as questions of class, age, ethnicity or gender in shaping our orientation towards particular urban spaces.

### **Theorising sex and consumption**

Though sexual consumption per se has been a relatively muted theme in many traditions of urban studies, the connection between sex and consumption in cities has often been hinted at discussions of both modern and post-modern cities. For example, themes of fetishization, desire and display were prominent in some of the earliest accounts of the urban experience in the modern age (e.g. Benjamin's, 2002, arcades project), with flâneurial accounts of the city connecting the pleasures of walking the city to particular modes of scopic consumption that were both gendered and sexed (see Buck Morss 1986). Sociological accounts have also emphasized how the city can intensify sexual desire via the construction of a specific 'atmosphere' (through, for example, lighting that highlights the sensuous and ludic qualities of nighttime as a space/time of sexuality encounter) (see, for example, Schlor, 1998). Here, studies have not only focused on the commercial thoroughfares of the city centre, but also those more marginal sites that might be eroticized through an association with ruination, industry or the return of the repressed (e.g. nature, wildlife, weeds) (Gandy, 2012). However, most accounts of the way desire circulates in the city have instead focused on the importance of particular commercial sites as providing a locus for those with particular sexual tastes or proclivities, with certain venues, bars and clubs becoming known or even notorious for forms of sexualised encounter. Whilst sex itself might not always be performed in such spaces, the association of particular premises with distinctive sexual identities has

served to construct a moral geography in which certain neighbourhoods and areas become 'magnets' for those seeking particular forms of sexual encounter.

Many pivotal ideas about the intersection of consumption and sexuality hence emerge from studies of LGBT experiences of the city. Herein, a large number of commentators have shown that 'gay villages' can be understood as spaces which take on value, and are hence consumed, by many in the LGBT community who experience forms of homophobia and/or transphobia elsewhere. This is not to say that all venues are accommodating of all in the LGBT 'community', with many commercial spaces seeking to cultivate exclusivity by exercising some limits on who is able to access these spaces (something that can be particularly problematic for ethnic minorities, working class and older LGBT individuals) (see Doan, 2015). Gay gentrification is then a frequent observed outcome of the commercial processes that have ultimately integrated once marginalized sexual cultures into the mainstream urban economy (Knopp, 1990). While such processes of assimilation have their limits given some forms of sexual practice and identity continue to be excluded from formal spaces of consumption, this points to the way that diverse sexual cultures, practices and identities have been commodified via processes of urban investment and property speculation. Marketing cities to LGBT consumers has become, in many instances, as vital to city promotion as the selling of urban spaces as 'family-friendly' – albeit that this often relies upon the construction of imagined boundaries between LGBT and straight spaces (Collins, 2004b). The outcome, according to some commentators, is a city characterised by different sexual *fields*, each consisting of a pool of like-minded 'buyers and sellers' existing in different neighbourhoods (Green, 2008).

The implication here is that cities exhibit distinctive sexual geographies that overlay other cartographies of taste, class and consumption, creating value in the process. But the idea that the city is clearly striated on sexual lines, and that neighbourhoods are characterized by distinctive forms of straight or queer sexual consumption (as implied by the sexual fields idea), is perhaps too simple. This special issue hence develops – and critiques – such theories about the sexual organization of consumption and the consumption of sex in the city. It begins instead from the standpoint that attempts to differentiate LGBT, queer and straight consumption are problematic in societies where 'sexual marketplaces' are not discrete in space or time, and sexual identities are arguably more fluid than ever before.. Indeed, as recent studies of the gay village have shown (e.g. Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2014; Gorman-Murray and Nash, 2014), LGBT residence is rarely restricted to designated 'gay villages', with the boundaries of such areas being both mobile and permeable. In this sense, it appears that the contemporary city is characterized by diverse, overlapping sexual 'marketplaces' (Laumann et al, 2004), with new technologies (e.g. mobile telephone apps and geo-coded dating sites) allowing new forms of sexual consumption and encounter to emerge in spaces which escape easy characterization as either 'straight' or 'gay'.

Such brief observations on the fluidity and flux of sexuality, profit and consumption across and within cities in the developed and developing world underlines that sexuality is more than epiphenomenal or merely coincidental in the making of urban economies (Aalbers and Deinema, 2012). Indeed, in a context where many societies across the globe proclaim to be more open about sexuality, and more accepting of sexual diversity, the opportunities for investors, developers, and retailers to profit through the promotion of commercial or objectified sex appears higher than ever (Hubbard and Wilkinson, 2015). In the post-crisis city, these observations are particularly significant given some conventional tactics of urban

property development have been found lacking: not only does sex sell, it appears recession-proof. The implication here is that the regulation of sex in the city – via licensing, planning, policing, environmental and public health – is not simply about the repression of desire, but concerns the production, and exploitation, of profitable forms of sexual consumption (Brown, 2000). Each and every act that regulates sexuality has a spatial outcome, and shifts the visibility of sexuality in the city in ways that can transform notions of both profitability and pleasure.

From this point of departure, this Special Issue explores how sex and sexuality is differently valued and commodified through urban processes. While not all sex in the city is paid for, this special issue focuses on how the relation between the body, desire and the city – often mediated by communication technologies – can be commodified and commercialized in different ways. While these issues have been addressed previously – principally through geographic studies of ‘gay consumption’ and the locations of sex work (see Brown and Browne, 2016) – this issue notably extends across other disciplinary traditions in its exploration of sex and consumption. The importance of economic contributions is a case in point. In the previous special issue of this journal on sex and the city, Collins (2004a) set out a detailed account of the intersection of sociobiological, social and economic theory that helps explain why sexual desire is such an important influence on individual behaviour and why this is important in explaining traditions, rites and practices relating to coupling in its diverse forms. This suggested that sexual desire strongly conditions the intensity of use of urban leisure opportunities. From this perspective, Collins (2004a) proposed a rational choice economic model of urban sexuality drawing on the analytical framework of ‘consumption technology’ formalised in Lancaster (1966a; 1966b). Purely for graphical expositional simplicity, Collins (2004) condensed the entire range of recreational sexual services into a single metric. Likewise, all aspects of marriage-type companionship were condensed into a single metric. Individuals (whether single or partnered) were posited to satisfy these two needs subject to various resource constraints. These constraints were (at that time) contended to be determined, in large part, by different endowments of time and wealth, physical attractiveness and various personality traits.

Here, time-dependent search costs (for sex and companionship) were argued to be significantly lower in urban settings than rural settings and were viewed likely to vary in towns and cities of different sizes or orders. Various works in this collection of papers indicate that technological progress and liberal social change has since intervened to dramatically alter the character of the sexscape and also the technological scope for sexual consumption across the urban-rural continuum. Essentially urban-rural divergences in time-dependent search costs (and hence resource constraints) have likely diminished significantly for many individuals and households. Greater tolerance of sexual dissidence and widespread use of partner search apps on smartphones has likely helped mitigate the extent of journey-to-leisure commuting and urban in-migration. Accordingly, it has theoretically also contributed to substantial revenue diminution - and thus physical decline and re-configuration - of some urban sexual spaces in both core and non-core city locations.

Such physical decline and reconfiguration has also been deliberately accelerated and exploited by neoliberal ‘regeneration’ in various economies, with urban policies appropriating sexualised community spaces and sexualised public or quasi-public realms. Such appropriation enables the transformation of such spaces into primarily private sector dominions. In this vein, critical commentary has suggested that the city is effectively being

'cleansed' in the principal interests of elite large capital-holding cliques and interests aligned to politically conservative, heteronormative residential populations (see, for example, Hubbard, 2004; Sanders-McDonagh et al, 2016). In some cases this 'cleansing' process has been resisted in situ; in other cases such sexualised community and public realms have been reconstituted in other less central urban locations (see Maginn and Steinmetz 2014 for diverse examples of resistance and regulation of sex industries, and see Doan 2015 for case studies of shifting LGBT landscapes and planning imperatives). Nevertheless, in turn, such new sites may inevitably be subject to the same market dynamics of conflict with neoliberal appropriative forces at some later juncture.

The papers in this Special Issue explore these economic dynamics of investment and disinvestment via case studies of sexual consumption in cities in different globalization arenas, taking in both Western and non-Western cities. Though the methodological and theoretical approaches taken are varied, a number of overlapping themes can be readily discerned, namely: transformations in the evolution, location and visibility of both virtual and real 'sexualised spaces' in the city (see, for example, the papers by Yue and Leung, 2015; Gorman-Murray and Nash, 2016; Smart and Whittemore, 2016; Lewis, in press, this issue); changes in the supply and demand for sexual services, goods and images in different urban contexts (see, for example, the papers by Della Giusta et al, 2016; Chapuis, 2016; Lindenblatt and Egger, 2016; Kong, 2016) and, finally, developments in the evolution and regulation of the sexual economy of cities in the light of sociotechnical change and the aftermath of the global economic crisis (see, for example, the papers by Kunkel (in press, this issue); Maginn, Prior and Hubbard, 2015; Collins and Drinkwater, 2016; Crewe and Martin, 2016). As such, this Special Issue directly contributes to ongoing debates concerning the ways that sexual identities and practices create distinctive moments of pleasure and leisure in the city, and, conversely, how cities create and even fetishize different forms of sexual consumption.

### *Social and Cultural Change in LGBT Spaces*

Five of the papers in this issue directly speak to the theme of social and cultural change in LGBT spaces. These papers examine the shifting landscapes of LGBT consumption in a range of national and urban settings – including cities and regions in the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong – and in relation to diverse land uses and social networks – including real estate markets, leisure sites, neoliberal politics and new networking technologies. The papers by Nathaniel Lewis (in press, this issue) and by Audrey Yue and Helen Hok-Sze Leung (2015) both respond to the much-noted intersection of creative city discourses with the social acceptance and material embeddment of LGBT populations in contemporary cities. Here, Lewis (in press, this issue) discusses the complex locational and consumption choices (including residential preferences) of gay men in Washington D.C. in relation to processes of neoliberalisation, homonormalisation and creative city planning. Reading the decision-making processes of gay identified households through new aspirational styles enables Lewis to offer a nuanced, critical interpretation of neoliberalism and homonormativity in relation to gay urban cultures and consumption patterns. As he notes, both working class and ethnic minority gay men are often marginalised via such processes and find the much vaunted hypermobility of gay male culture in Washington DC difficult to access. Focusing attention on Singapore and Hong

Kong, Yue and Leung (2015) draw insights from critical creative industrial studies, queer geographies and cultural studies, to examine the intersections of gay clusters, urban renewal and social movements in these cities. Significantly, rather than default to 'Western' paradigms and debates about the development of LGBT urban landscapes, they offer a new theoretical perspective on the 'disjunctive' rise of the queer Asian city.

The papers by Michael Smart and Andrew Whittemore, by Andrew Gorman-Murray and Catherine J. Nash and by Alan Collins and Stephen Drinkwater critically consider changing LGBT residential and commercial landscapes in the US, the UK, Canada and Australia respectively. Smart and Whittemore's (2016) study of shifting gay and lesbian real estate markets in Dallas over 1986-2012 identifies a circumscribed diffusion of 'gaybourhoods' – a dispersal of gay and lesbian residence in a way that is creating new clusters adjacent to long-standing existing gay and lesbian territory. They find a preference amongst gay and lesbian homebuyers and renters to at least stay close to the traditional gay and lesbian enclaves of Dallas (e.g. Oak Lawn). Albeit focusing on consumer landscapes in Sydney and Toronto, Gorman-Murray and Nash's (2016) research takes a similar interest in de-concentration, diffusion and 're-grounding' of queer consumption. They are concerned with the relational geographies of 'traditional' gay villages and 'emergent' inner-city queer-friendly neighbourhoods in these cities. Stressing the importance of sociable mainstream-LGBT interactions in the constitution of new LGBT leisure sites, they tease out the differences between the two cities, across the neighbourhoods within them, and between daytime and night-time leisure spaces. Their conclusion is that orthodox readings of such consumer spaces remain fraught with problems, noting that emerging leisure sites are paradoxical in many ways. This noted, Collins and Drinkwater (2016) focus on gay villages and other gay spaces in the UK, addressing the macro-level processes contributing to the reconfiguration and possible decline of gay urban spaces. They train attention on changing social attitudes, clusters of gay pubs and, importantly, new gay social networking apps. These social and technological transformations appear to be reshaping gay landscapes in the UK, encouraging fragmentation and the shift towards a 'post-gay' era of consumption.

### *Urban Market Dynamics of Sex Work*

Beyond the fact that red-light areas provide urban geographers with a particularly vibrant environment in which to examine the corporeality of metropolitan life and to document the emergence of a distinctive 'subcultural' space, there is much that can be learnt about the wider relations of sexuality and consumption in the city through overt examination of such spaces of sex work. In particular, while it has been noted that the general quest for hospitable, safe and sanitized inner cities has led to the effective disappearance of street sex working in many contexts (Hubbard, 2004), as well as the gradual evisceration and gentrification of some well-known areas of off-street sex working (such as London's Soho or New York's Times Square), the rise of online modes of buying and selling sex suggests that the dominant tendencies here are ones of spatial and temporal displacement, not the decline of sex work per se as part of the urban economy. While there remain obvious and deep-seated problems in obtaining reliable data about the extent of urban sex work – especially in contexts where it is best described as 'survival' sex work and those selling it are doing so in the context of precarious and complex lives – the use of 'data mining' methods means that online data can be found which perhaps offer us some insight into these forms of displacement and re-location.



In this regard, Andreas Lindenblatt and Peter Egger (2016) use such online data about advertised sexual services (and prices) provide a detailed account of regional differences in female sex work in Germany. Here, they find evidence of higher prices and incomes for sex work in former East Germany than in the former West, possibly a legacy of the luxury status of commercial sex in the East, and established socio-cultural perceptions of risky/safe sex in the 'shadow' of the former Iron Curtain. Such studies exploring the advertisement (and supply) of sexual services are usefully complemented by those exploring demand, but there is of course less known about who buys sex (and why). Focusing on this, Marina Della Giusta, Maria Laura Di Tommaso and Sarah Louise Jewell (2016, this issue), use British surveys of sexual behaviour to examine men's demand for paid sex in the UK, investigating differences between rural and urban areas. Their conclusion that there are differences in the likelihood of men of different religion, age, education and perceptions of risk to have bought sex is perhaps less important in the context of this issue than their conclusion that London represents a different sexual marketplace with different sedimented attitudes towards sex work than found elsewhere in the UK. This implies that the norms surrounding sex work, or the visibility of sex work in the capital, are different than those elsewhere, something that suggests a complex interplay of supply and demand that remains place-specific even in an era of virtualism and online sex work.

A somewhat different perspective on the embedment of sex work in particular spaces is offered by Amandine Chapuis (2016, this issue) in her ethnographic account of the tourist consumption of Amsterdam's red light district. Noting this has become a site of extensive and intense touristification, shaped with a diversity of touristic and consumption practices, Chapuis nonetheless explores the affective and moral geographies of this touristified sexual landscape and concludes that this space creates a norm that sex is recreational and pleasurable. This does not necessarily normalise the idea of sex as commodity to be consumed, but as she shows, positions sex work as central to the consumption of one particular city destination (see also McDonagh, 2016b). Of course, in many other cities experiencing spaces of is discoursed as less important to an authentic tourist engagement with place, but this does not mean that prostitution is not significant in the forms of 'hospitality' on offer, merely that it is less obviously visible in a known red light district. For example, in her paper focusing on Frankfurt, Jenny Kunkel (in press) shows that prostitution is no longer contained in the 'traditional' district, and is more dispersed, being allowed to occur in a wider range of neighbourhoods, albeit with the more gentrified and politer neighbourhoods being more vigorously policed by the state and law in the interests of avoiding confrontation.

Shifting attention back to the sellers rather than those who consume sexual services, Travis Kong (2016) attends to the case of 'money boys' in post-socialist China. These male sex workers are rural-to-urban migrants whose movements from country to the burgeoning cities of Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen are motivated through a mixture of sexual desires (i.e. to be able to explore different identities and practices away from small rural communities) and economic motivations (i.e. to avoid 'dead-end' or monotonous factory jobs). Locating urban sex work within wider networks of migration and regulation (given the criminalisation of sex work in China), Kong (2016) examines the paradoxical position of money boys in Chinese

society, noting how they manage multiple stigmatised identities (as rural migrants, sex workers and men-who-have-sex-with-men) in a context of neoliberal market reforms and social transformation that places them in a potentially profitable position whereby they are able to exploit and monetize their identities. This said, Kong concludes that there are many barriers which prevent money boys becoming fully-fledged 'sexual entrepreneurs'.

### *The Regulation of Urban Sexual Consumption*

The fact that the consumption of sexual services is constrained or enabled by different modes of policing and municipal regulation is a theme that comes across in all four papers on urban prostitution and sex work. Here, much can be said about policing and the importance of vice legislation (as emphasised in Kunkel's paper, this issue): in contexts where sex work (or the organisation of sex work) is illegal, sex for sale venues are much less likely to advertise given fears of arrest and repression. Conversely, legality can encourage a different modality of policing, with the focus on health and safety, emphasising protection of sexual minorities rather than the repression of prostitution. The same is true of the visibility of venues which offer opportunity for gay or lesbian sex on-premise in contexts where homosexual acts remain subject to legal censure: in most contexts, gay villages have only emerged to become visible and well-advertised features of the urban scene when homosexuality has been decriminalised. But beyond such 'headline' changes in the way that criminal law shapes sexual consumption, and the role of police action that can repress illegal sexualities, an increasing focus in urban studies is on the municipal regulation of sexual consumption, via by laws, environmental regulation, zoning and planning.

Three papers speak directly to this theme: considering the way that cultural, social and legal norms intersect to shape the legality and visibility of spaces of sexual consumption in cities in England and Wales, Northern Ireland, and Australia. Paul Maginn and Graham Ellison's paper examines the regulation of consumption of commercial sex spaces and services in Northern Ireland, stressing the distinct approaches taken here as opposed to elsewhere in the UK. They argue that commercial sex spaces have been the subject of intense political and legal oversight, with religious values and moral reasoning influencing debates about commercial sex spaces and their regulation. Here, it is shown that devolutionary tendencies here allow sexual spaces to become particularly loaded spaces in debates about national values, with such sites inadvertently sometimes caught up in a wider geopolitics. Notably, in Belfast, a number of unlicensed sex shops have appealed directly to higher courts in their attempt to secure their legality, but always failed. However, elsewhere in the UK, sex shops are more routinely granted licenses, and in some cases become more visible in city centres. Addressing this, Louise Crewe and Amber Martin (2016) explore not only the mainstreaming of sex retailing but the emergence of female-oriented 'erotic boutiques' in city centres in England and Wales. Here, they examine how the spatiality, design and marketing of erotic boutiques differs from male-oriented sex shops and reflects the emergence of 'up-scale' female spaces of sexual consumption. The fact that most of these spaces are unlicensed, and hence not subject to any specific form of regulation means that they are essentially 'self-regulated', marketing themselves in ways that conform with acceptable ideals of feminised, normal but decidedly 'kinky' consumption.

But the type of feminised sex shops that now sell sex toys and lingerie on the High Street would have no doubt scandalised many in the past, and found their presence on the High Street much more embattled. Social attitudes, and accompanying forms of legal control, shift over time as dominant mores change. But, as Jason Prior and Phil Hubbard, these do not always shift in synch with one another, and sometimes what seems normal and even healthy still remains illegal in the eyes of the law. Obscenity laws are a case in point, with what 'normal adults' find offensive shifting markedly over time, often out of step with the assumptions written into law. This is also manifest in the regulation of sexual spaces, and Prior and Hubbard's (2015, this issue) paper describes the changes in the way commercial sex premises in London and Sydney are regulated, noting the overwhelming shift from control via policing to planning. Here, in an innovative analytical move, they examine the varied temporalities at play in such processes municipal planning, and note that these sometimes create ambiguity rather than certainty in terms of what forms of sex premises are actually legal.

## Conclusion

The focus on changes in the geographies of LGBT spaces, the dynamics of sex markets and the regulation of sexual consumption provides an organising frame for this Special Issue on sex, consumption, and the city. But collectively, the thirteen papers collectively straddle two long-standing, distinct lines of inquiry in research in studies of sexuality and space – those into the formation, experience and transformation of LGBT social relations and urban spaces (on the one hand), and those into heterosexual subjectivities, practices and geographies (on the other). Consumption – of spaces and of sex – offers a focused lens for exploring and combining together the theoretical insights offered across a range of studies of sexuality and space. As such, exploring the practices, representations and governance of sexual consumption enables us to grasp the wider significance of sexual dynamics in the constitution of cities. Indeed, whilst focused on consumption, the papers do not ignore or overlook the relations of production. Production and consumption are considered hand-in-hand in these papers – perhaps best conceived as a dialectic that continually (re)creates and transforms urban spaces over time, encouraging the entwining, and sometimes disentangling, of different forms of sexuality.

This given, one profitable line of inquiry that might be taken forward is the changing relationship between LGBT and heterosexual subjects, social practices and geographies. With LGBT lives arguably becoming more visible in many countries through the extension of normative rights such as marriage and family formation (while we acknowledge the homonormalising critique of such legal changes), and with certain types of 'scary' heterosexual relations (Hubbard, 2000), such as sex work, also becoming more visible and diffuse, what implications might these reconfigurations have for the heterosexualisation of space and the centring and privileging of certain forms of heterosexual relations, practices and subjectivities in our cities? While there have been debates about the mainstreaming – the homonormalisation – of certain LGBT populations and consumer practices to the exclusion of others (see Duggan 2003; Binnie 2004; Richardson 2005 on the heteronormative), less has been said about the spatial implications of this for heterosexuality. Are possibilities opened up for a broader range of heterosexual subjectivities to be emplaced in the city; or are we seeing conventional heteronormative values defended and buttressed

(Nash and Brown, 2015)? Or is there a more complex, patchy geography emerging here where both tendencies are observable, albeit at different scales (think here about the difference between virtual, online worlds, city neighbourhoods and domestic spaces).

In this respect, a further range of both 'normative' and 'scary' heterosexual consumer practices and subjectivities, which have not been explicitly studied in this Special Issue, could be explored in greater depth in future work in urban studies. Such inquiries might include the continuing consequences of the privileging of the nuclear family form in real estate markets (Johnson, 2000; Frisch, 2002), the spatial effects of web cam and homed based sex work (Prior and Gorman-Murray, 2014; Jones, 2016), the proliferating visibility, marketing and use of pharmaceuticals to enhance sexual performance or reproductive health (Del Casino and Brooks, 2015), the geographies of wedding and honeymoon tourism (Johnston, 2006), the experiences of polyamory in public and private spheres (Johnston and Longhurst 2010), and even the discursive and material spaces of 'romance' holidays, such as Valentine's Day, as manifest in advertising, leisure spaces, retail and hospitality services. Looking into these and other consumer practices might reveal the ways in which heterosexualities are diversifying even while some configurations remain socially and spatially marginal. This is not only about specific forms or packages of heterosexuality, it is also about their intersection with notions of appropriate femininity and masculinity. Witness here, for example, the backlash to male 'pick up artists' and the 'seduction communities' who feel it is acceptable to approach women in public spaces (O'Neill, 2015), something happening at the same time some women feel the need defend their right to be sexually assertive via 'slutwalks' (Lim and Fanghanel, 2013). What do such controversies say about the *value* of different heterosexual performances?

At the same time, further research on LGBT urban geographies is clearly needed. While there is increasing scholarly, media and public discussion about the decline of gay villages and the fragmentation, diffusion and possible re-clustering of LGTB populations – explored by various contributions to this issue – there still remains little research into the effects of gay village decline for both LGBT and straight populations (Reynolds 2009; Brown 2014). How are LGBT populations represented and made legible to other populations in the absence of such spaces? And how might the 'creative gay' stereotype be changing as places of intensive 'creativity' are selectively 'de-gay'd'? This is important given the continued links made between gay villages, 'the creative city' agenda, and city marketing and planning has fuelled overt attempts to commodify gay identities (for further evidence, also see Lewis, 2013, on the case of Ottawa, Canada, which created a gay village in 2011 – Le/The Village – through city ordinances in the single-minded pursuit of investment). Gay village decline has implications for urban planning issues, including business zoning and development, tourism and marketing, heritage and historical preservation, and the local targeting of community outreach and health services (Forsyth 2001; Nash and Gorman-Murray 2015).

These future research directions have consequences for policy, planning and practice. Certainly the management gay village decline and fragmentation of LGBT urban landscapes connects directly to urban planning as well as the remit (and resources) of LGBT community organisations. A broader concern, though, is how planning and policy might account for and accommodate the increasing diversity – or at least increasing visibility – of sexualities and sexual geographies. This is a question that reaches across social, economic and land-use planning. Certainly there has been resistance to the extension of 'normative' legal rights to same-sex couples (Browne and Nash 2014), so how might planning, policy and practice be

deployed to mediate and ameliorate these tensions? Furthermore, as Crewe and Martin (2016) indicate in their paper, new forms of sex-based business are emerging that evade the 'seedy' image of conventional sex shops. What questions do erotic boutiques or home-based sex work pose for processes of urban governance? How might planning or licensing deal with different types of businesses and premises, and shape rights to the city? What makes a sex premise a noxious land use, if anything? Clearly, not all sex premises or spaces where sex is consumed fit neatly into aesthetic divisions between clean/seedy or downmarket/gentrified, so how should municipal regulators deal with this? As Prior and Hubbard (2015) contend in their paper, this might require a more nuanced appreciation of urban temporalities as well as spatialities, and a sense as to what is acceptable when as well as where. But these are matters that are bound into notions of profitability as well as morality, and ultimately, the breadth of contributions in this Special Issue demonstrate that sex and sexualities can be profitable indeed.

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